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# The Conservation of Archæological Evidences



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## THE CONSERVATION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCES.

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The conservation of archaeological evidences consists in preserving them all unimpaired where they may be available to the workers who use this method of reconstructing prehistoric cultures. This we would take for granted were it not that laws prohibiting the exportation of antiquities are frequently presented to legislative bodies while the destruction of archaeological evidences by untrained excavators grows apace.

The passage of laws preventing the exportation of archaeological specimens, especially from such countries as Canada and the United States, is contemptible. There may be some excuse for such laws in certain countries, as, for instance, Egypt, Greece, Italy, and Mexico, but few specimens are found in Northern America so unique or rare that many more like them may not be found through serious and careful exploration, and these would replace any which are taken out of the country.

Practically, where archaeological specimens are exported from a country by foreign archaeologists, the people of that country are benefited, for the true archaeologist seldom explores a country which is being thoroughly cared for by its own countrymen, and these countrymen are benefited in as much as the explorations are conducted at the expense of others, and they secure by means of reports and otherwise the knowledge resulting from the explorations.

For example, I have known of a great shell heap covering many acres, and in places reaching a height of nine feet, which had never been explored systematically, and from which very few specimens had been taken, except those uncovered by road builders. No attempt was made by the people of the country in which the shell heap was located even to properly preserve, label, and publish these specimens. A foreign expedition sent one of its men there to carry on work with a staff of five men, including at least three of scientific training and ability, and caused explorations to be conducted, chiefly in one spot, for a period of not less than a month, and finally published the results of the exploration, illustrating, by means of drawings and expensive reproductions of photographs, practically all the different objects found. Then objection was raised by the people of the locality who had so long neglected their opportunities. They even endeavored to get a law passed to make it illegal for foreigners to remove antiquities from their country. One man interested in science inquired if anything more could be found at the site, and seemed to feel with resentment that everything had been taken out of his country. As a matter of fact, the shell heap is so large, covering, as it does, several acres, that it is unlikely that it will ever be completely dug away. Judging from the number of specimens found in a month's work, scores of similar collections could be made from that one shell heap, and there are many hundreds of shell heaps in this same country. The excavation made by the expedition, while large in itself, was exceedingly small in proportion to the acres of heap left undisturbed.

Since this time, a period of considerably over ten years, the people of that country have made no systematic exploration of the site, or if they have, have not published their results or even communicated them to scientific men, and consequently they would have no complete knowledge of it, and no complete series of specimens from it, had not the institution of the foreign country been some-

what generous. The foreign expedition not only presented a copy of its publications, describing the place and the antiquities found therein, to every great country in the world, but sent copies to the libraries and learned societies of the country explored, in particular the government and university libraries in the vicinity of the shell heap. Moreover, casts of the specimens and duplicate specimens themselves were supplied, in exchange, to the country in which the explorations were conducted.

The surface survey of Blandford Township, Oxford County, Ontario, a township taken at random, carried on by Mr. W. J. Wintemberg, resulted in the location by this one man of twenty-six lodge and village sites, five burial places, and many surface finds. The township is less than thirteen miles long and barely nine miles wide, an area much smaller than one hundred square miles. Less than nine field working days resulted in these discoveries. This makes a find of more than three sites per day. More time or a greater number of observers would no doubt have developed even more sites and material. As there is no reason to consider this township especially favorable for prehistoric occupation, it being in the midst of Ontario, and not bordering a great lake or having a very large river, we may conclude that the other townships in the area (common to Southern Ontario, the cleared forest area, the St. Lawrence lowlands, and the Iroquoian linguistic area) would average just as productive. We may expect some to be more barren of archaeological remains, but others, those located on lakes or including special features, such as quarries or rich corn lands, to far surpass it in archaeological productiveness. It thus seems that there is ample material in this whole area for all archaeological workers and for both our own and foreign museums.

If the archaeologists of a country are conducting satisfactory explorations, foreigners will seldom come and explore in that country, but will content themselves with reading the reports, and confine their explorations to other regions which are not being properly explored. When they come to need specimens to give exposition to the public of archaeological facts regarding that country, they will send for duplicate specimens, endeavoring to obtain them by exchange or purchase. If obtained by exchange, valuable material for a similar purpose is returned, saving the expense of exploration, and with the additional economy that the duplicates of both are made useful. If they are secured by purchase, the money may be used for exploration where most needed. Casts and even illustrations, if arranged to bring out an idea, rather than to show a series of curiosities, may do more good in educating the citizens of a country, than a few unrelated, although unique, and financially valuable specimens.

People are continually digging up archaeological specimens, sometimes in the course of agricultural pursuits, sometimes where roads, railways, canals, irrigation ditches, and the like are being constructed. The knowledge regarding these specimens is seldom preserved, even in manuscript, and is soon forgotten. Conservation of archaeological knowledge would consist in the publication of these facts, and the distribution of these publications to the libraries of the interested countries of the world. By this means the facts are sure to be saved even if the manuscript should be burned, or a single published account be lost, for if one library burns, others have the publication which may be copied or reprinted.

The exploration of a site by untrained men is too often in the spirit of adventure, and the mound, village site, or what not, is destroyed by those who do not put on record their results, so that no serious or trained archaeological worker can ever explore it and give to the world the facts,

Specimens disturbed by such people, or even those collected by archaeologists, are too often carelessly kept, sometimes without even being catalogued, so that the data regarding them is sooner or later lost, and practically never available to those archaeologists who are really doing serious work. Even in museums, specimens are too often allowed to be broken by the careless handling of untrained subordinates, ruined by the ravages of insects, by violent changes of temperature and moisture, and by the damaging effects of allowing the sun to shine on such specimens as are made of shell, antler, and bone. All this is also a waste of money. The conservation of archaeological evidence would include the numbering and cataloguing of these specimens, so that the numbers should not be effaced, and so that if one catalogue were lost or destroyed, as for instance by fire, another would be available. Men should be trained as preparators, cataloguers, and caretakers, so that there should be, instead of untrained and careless people handling and caring for the specimens, a sufficient number of persons from whom may be drawn those to properly number and catalogue the specimens, as well as to see that other things are done, as, for instance, the drawing of curtains when in the course of the day the sun reaches such a position that its rays tend to destroy such objects as those made of antler and other materials which are easily damaged by the sunshine.

It may better conserve the antiquities of a country to let them lie a few years longer where they have been for many years beneath the surface of the ground than to allow them to be excavated by an inexperienced or unskilled person, or one who fails to place his material results on free public exhibition, and to carefully publish these results, where they may be available to all students. At present there is such great lack of well-trained archaeological field workers that comparatively little field work should be attempted, and funds should not be made available for exploration faster than men can be trained to wisely expend them.

It should be remembered that we of to-day often look upon the archaeological results of a generation ago as of little or no value, but regret that we have not the opportunities of that time to examine the unimpaired archaeological evidences enjoyed by the earlier workers; at the same time we clamor for conclusions to the exclusion of descriptive details. Have we to-day any greater right to expect our bare conclusions to be of value than had those others, and is it not our first duty to keep our conclusions and theories distinctly separate from the facts, and to record the facts in such a way, so that our conclusions may be checked or revised?

The conservation of archaeological material seems clearly to consist, not in passing dog-in-the-manger laws, but in preventing, so far as possible, all excavation of the archaeological sites by untrained excavators; in the now most unheard of careful cataloguing by trained clerks of specimens, in the proper care of these by specially skilled mechanics, in the publication of the results of excavation, and in differentiating clearly between our facts and our theories.











